

PRINCE BILLOW AND HIS MEMOIRS

117

conflict with Russia, of which Germany would have to bear the brunt; that such a risk could only be run in return for ample compensations; and that no British offer, official or semi-official, ever reached the Wilhelinstrasse which contained the elements of an acceptable bargain. He adds that all the men responsible for Germany's foreign policy agreed that, while an alliance on favourable terms would have been most welcome, a partnership without equality of risk could not be entertained, since Germany, unlike Great Britain, did not stand alone. What our Empire was to us, he argues, the Triple Alliance was to her. No German statesman had a right to expose his country to the hazards of a great war without bringing the Austrian partner into the pact, which British statesmen declined to allow. It is a plausible argument sustained with the usual skill, and in fairness we must remember that the weakness of the Russian colossus was not revealed till 1904, But most Englishmen and many Germans will continue to believe that it would have been wiser to win and hold the confidence of the British Empire than, in fear of a breach with Russia, to drive us to turn our eyes elsewhere. The second volume is even more arresting than the first, for it covers a more eventful period. The impressions derived from the first instalment of this monumental apologia are confirmed by the sequel. Bismarck wrote as well as he talked, and there is scarcely a dull page in the book. He looks back with abounding satisfaction on his years of office, his services to throne and Fatherland, his skilful diplomacy, his eloquent speeches in the Reichstag. The whole work breathes the full-blooded conviction that under his guidance Germany enjoyed power and prosperity, that the subsequent shipwreck was due to the dropping of the pilot and the neglect of

his warnings.
William n, he declares over and over again,
required a coun-
sellor of exceptional wisdom and courage to
restrain him from
his dangerous follies, and when the fourth
Chancellor was gone
there was none to take his place. Tirpitz had no
political head.
Bethmann was a timid mediocrity, ever unable to
make up his
mind. Schoen, Jagow, Monts, Schiemann, and
other actors on
the crowded stage are rarely mentioned without
expressions of
anger or contempt. The Prince even stoops to
reveal secrets
of the private life of two well-known public men,
one of whom
was still alive. Few readers will close this volume
without a
diminished respect for the character of its
brilliant author.
In the field of foreign affairs the book is
disappointing.